

The old Manhattan School was built in 1902, after the area's name had been changed from Sunnydale to Manhattan. The new school was needed to protect children from having to walk all the way from Manhattan and Des Moines to Sunnydale. A few families who lived where Manhattan is today decided that the walk through the dense woods, where wild animals still roamed, was too distant and dangerous for their children--four difficult miles, sometimes through deep snows and dripping vines that soaked the children's clothing. So the parents and others helped form a new school district at Manhattan. There were 12 original homeowners in this district, with 14 children of school age.

A school board was formed after a petition was granted. Manhattan School District Number 135 was formed in 1902. Members of the new board included Harry Burton, William H. Miller and Aaron Dunbar. Edward Gould served as clerk. William Miller lived on the beach in the original William Brown homestead. Miller Creek was named for him and his wife Clarinda, and the beach (now the site of the Normandy Park Cove) was called Miller's Beach and Miller's Bay. The Millers were widely known because they welcomed settlers to use the beach to picnic and camp. (Wonderful World, p. 10)

Aaron Dunbar and his 22-year-old wife Hattie (Ayers) came to the Manhattan area in 1889, when less than half a dozen families lived here. He had come west from Wisconsin the year before to work in the sawmills (William Van Gasken's sawmill in Des Moines being one of them) and on the Mosquito fleet boats. Dunbar bought 160 acres between 180th S.W. and 192nd S.W., bordered on the west by 8th Ave. S.W. and on the east by First Ave. South. He cleared his land with the help of oxen, and used the timber to build his first house, a log cabin which was later replaced by a larger house. In 1902 that house was moved to 4th Ave. S.W. (Wonderful World, p. 13)

A year after buying his property, Dunbar summoned his fiancée from Wisconsin. He met her at the train in Puyallup. The couple was married in "Grandma" Blasher's home in Tacoma on August 5th, 1889. A robust man of 24, Dunbar rowed to Des Moines to get lumber for his house--then towed it back behind his boat. He frequently rowed across the Sound to Vashon Island, and even brought his new bride Hattie back from Des Moines in a rowboat. (Timber, Tides and Tales, p. 143)

The Dunbars had six children, five of whom--Margaret, Ella (Parks), Fern (Lingwood), Grant, and Roy--continued to live close to home. Presumably, all six attended Manhattan School. The Dunbars turned a portion of their land into a farm. The crops they grew--corn, strawberries and tomatoes, in addition to other fruits and eggs from their own hens--were sold at the Western Avenue Commission in Seattle, usually delivered on Dunbar's horse-drawn wagon carrying 80 crates. (Many Roads, p. 42)

In 1893 the family moved to Des Moines while Aaron worked in the mills and built his homestead, an old landmark in the Normandy Park area (as of 1975).

Ella Dunbar Parks recalled from those days that, "If there had been a heavy snowfall, my

father would hitch up the horse and sleigh and make a path for us up to the school house. . . . Each of us had a fruit tree of our own for which we were responsible. When the fruit was ripe, we picked it and sold it to buy clothing and other items. . . ." (Wonderful World, pp. 14-15)

Aaron Dunbar was a cornerstone of the Manhattan community. In addition to the schools, he supported many public enterprises, and sold part of his land to newcomers who brought needed skills and services to the area.

The school started within 30 days after the board was appointed. Clyde Sherman was the first teacher. Burton was appointed supervisor of the temporary one-room school building, located on the Dunbar property. The group then purchased an acre nearby from Mrs. Josephine Newal (sp?) on Kelly Road for their first school. Money for the Manhattan property and school had been collected from Sunnydale and Des Moines families. The school district accepted warrants until a 10-mill tax levy could be collected. Meanwhile, Burton, Miller and Dunbar paid all the expenses. (Many Roads, p. 43)

All of the families helped get the new school ready to open. Board members built a fence around the school grounds, dug a well and local people planted trees. Maude Brown Bissell, daughter of a Seattle pioneer, was the teacher. She married Walter Bissell, another early Highline settler, in 1909. The one-room building, heated by a large pot-bellied wood stove and accommodating all eight grades, was later expanded to include two rooms and a basement, plus a temporary portable classroom. Later the portable was moved to Sunnydale School, where it was still in use in the 1970s. (Many Roads, p. 43)

This two-room school was located where First Ave. South and South 19th now are. Children from the Manhattan area went there until the Highline School District was organized in the early 1940s. Then they went back to the Sunnydale School, and the Manhattan School became a social hall. (Wonderful World, p. 16) The school, located near First Avenue South and Normandy Road, was razed in 1962. (The Many Roads to Highline, pp. 19-21) A dental clinic now occupies that location.

A second generation of Dunbars seems to have attended the Manhattan School (at the northwest corner of First Avenue South and Normandy Road). A 1924-'25 class photo includes Pearl and Emerson Dunbar, as well as other "pioneer" family members such as John Bissell and Lloyd Dodd. (Wonderful World, p. 61)

In 1913 Grant Dunbar built his home at 191st and 1st Ave. S.W. Though remodeled, the house was still there as of 1991. Still a vigorous man in his eighties, Aaron Dunbar liked to help his neighbors and clear their land for building. By 1952, when Dunbar died, the area was fairly well developed, with new homes and businesses sprouting in Manhattan and along First Avenue South. Aaron, Hattie and Roy Dunbar are buried in the Hill Grove Cemetery at 16th Ave. South and South 200th.

The land for this small (one acre), obscure cemetery was donated by Fred Kindling. It holds many of the area's pioneers and original homesteaders. (Wonderful World, p. 16)

and Our Burien, p. 50) Grant Dunbar was on the cemetery board of directors for many years. (Timber, Tides and Tales, p. 68)

Manhattan was annexed to Normandy Park in 1983, 94 years after Aaron Dunbar first carved his home from the wilderness. Fern Dunbar Lingwood died in 1974. Her property is (was?) located off First Ave. South near S.W. 176th. Margaret Dunbar, who lived her whole life within a block of the family home, died in 1990. She was a member of the first graduating class of Highline High School. Ella Dunbar Parks, who returned to Normandy Park in the early 1960s and built her home on the lot her father had given her (he gave one to each child), volunteered her time at Highline Community Hospital while in her eighties.